

Dear Friends,

Exodus 14:13-31 + 15:20-21

Moses has led the people out of slavery. Pharaoh has however changed his mind about letting them go and has sent his soldiers and chariots to get them back. The chariots are coming at them from behind, while up ahead there is only the sea. There is nowhere left for them to go. They cry out in great fear. This is what Pharaoh wants. He wants them frightened. When they are frightened, he has them in his power.

But a frightened people is not what God wants. God speaks to them through Moses. Moses is a prophet, who has been given insights into the heart and mind of God. He is therefore God's mouthpiece. He says to them "Do not be afraid". Pharaoh wants fear. God does not want fear. Moses says more. He says "Stand still. The forces of Pharaoh, the forces of evil that you see today. You will never see them again. God is for you. You only have to keep still". God does not want fear. God wants trust. God says, "You can believe in me. You can have confidence in me. I am for you".

It's hard for the people to believe that. The sea is in front of them. The powerful heavy chariots are behind. They are surely doomed. But God tells Moses what to do. And Moses does it. He lifts up his staff and holds it over the sea and God drives the sea back by a strong east wind. The Hebrew word which is translated "wind" can also be translated "breath" or "spirit". The wind of God, the Spirit of God, the breath of God is powerful. When God breathes wonderful things happen. God creates Adam from the dust of the earth. Then God breathes into Adam and Adam becomes a living being. God breathes and the waves roll sideways, the sea divides and a path of dry land appears. Say these prayers with me, "Breathe on me breath of God"; "Spirit of the living God fall afresh on us"; "Come Holy Spirit renew the whole creation".

The people walk along the dry path through the sea. There is a wall of water to the right and to the left. Pharaoh's soldiers follow in those heavy chariots that move so fast and look so fierce. But suddenly they are at a disadvantage. They have a weakness. Because everything has a weakness. Their heavy wheels won't turn in the sand. They churn up the ground and it becomes mud, making it even more difficult for them to move. God tells Moses to raise his staff again, which he does. The waters return and cover the chariots and Pharaoh's entire army. Not one of them remains.

We did not want this mass slaughter. We want the Israelites to go free, but we'd rather the soldiers just gave up and went home. We'd rather Pharaoh said, "Never mind, rather than having slaves perhaps we could do our own manual work, with workers who are properly paid and with decent working conditions". Nice idea. Remember however that behind this story is another story, the story about the struggle between good and evil. When we remember that, we can see the message

of the story, that with God good ultimately triumphs. "God is love, so lover forever o'er the universe must reign".

And there's something appropriate about what happens. Pharaoh set out to bring destruction. He commanded that all Israelite boys should be drowned. In the end it's his men, not the Israelites who drown and who are seen no more. What you send out, you often get back. If you live by the sword, you die by the sword.

And this section of the story ends with Miriam, Moses sister, taking a tambourine and singing. All the women join her by taking their tambourines and dancing. The story began with brave women. Shiphrah and Puah the midwives who resisted Pharaoh and his command to kill the baby boys; Moses mother who saw that her baby was good and protected him; Moses sister, Miriam who watched over him and dared to approach Pharaoh's daughter; and Pharaoh's daughter herself who also resisted her Father's command and made sure that Moses survived. The story that began with courageous women ends with celebrating women who sing, dance and make music.

The story tells us that with God all things work together for good. It also reminds us that God is with us. And if God is with us, who can be against us?

God bless you,

Tony